

Libraries and the Great War
By William Howard Brett
Founder's Day Address  MCMXVIII



JOHNSON BRIGHAM

PRESIDENT'S ROOM
WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
CLEVELAND

4 September 1919

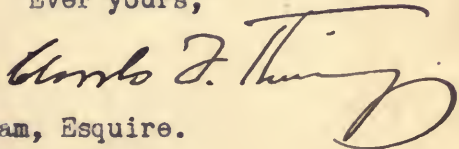
My dear Mr. Brigham:

You are a generous and gracious soul. I make an unworthy recognition. But the best I can do, I am glad to do. I return the pamphlet with a little legend.

I rejoice with you that your daughter is with you. Pray bear to her my warm regard. May every month make progress in restoring her to full health.

With best greetings to Mrs. Brigham and yourself, I am

Ever yours,



Johnson Brigham, Esquire.



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Founder's Day Address

LIBRARIES AND THE GREAT WAR

BY

WILLIAM HOWARD BRETT

LIBRARIAN OF THE CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1884-1918
AND DEAN OF THE LIBRARY SCHOOL, 1904-1918

WITH PREFATORY NOTE BY

CHARLES FRANKLIN THWING

PRESIDENT OF WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY



DELIVERED AT THE LIBRARY SCHOOL OF
WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY
JUNE 11, 1918

The Alumni of the Library School
of Western Reserve University pre-
sent in printed form this address of
the beloved Dean of the School, as
an expression of their deep grat-
itude for his life and leadership.

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PREFATORY NOTE

This address, as it was read by Mr. Brett one year ago, deeply moved all of us who heard it. Its reading to-day moves us even more deeply, for the lips that spoke its written words were, a few weeks later, sealed in death. These pages might properly be called *apologia pro vita sua*; they unconsciously interpret Mr. Brett's purposes, give intimations of his methods, express somewhat his philosophy, and, above all else, breathe the spirit of the man as a good soldier of humanity. They are not only *apologia*; they form also a *Nunc dimittis*. And could any farewell message be more fitting for the dear and great man to speak, or a more inspiring or comforting one for us, as students and co-workers, to receive?


C. F. T.

President's Office
Western Reserve University
June, 1919

For my dear friend,
John B. Bigham:
Clark F. Thomas



FOUNDER'S DAY ADDRESS

 ON this day set apart in the school year to honor our founder, to whom so many of our libraries owe their existence, who has by his wise beneficence done so much to promote the growth and usefulness of libraries, it is very fitting that we should consider seriously what new duties may be imposed upon our libraries and what opportunities may be open to them by the conditions of war.

The public library, free and supported by taxation, is little more than two generations old—a long period in human life, but brief in that of a great institution. It was a mere baby at the time of the Civil War, too small to do much, too young to be considered. Indeed, there was not at that time, so far as I can find, any record of a public library, as we now use the word, outside of the New England States, and few there. Never from that time until Germany broke the peace of the world has our national life been endangered, but our country has experienced a period of unexampled growth and prosperity. During that time our libraries have grown and prospered,

increasing in numbers and usefulness. They have proved their value in time of peace and have secured recognition. Now for the first time there comes for them the test of war.

In attempting to speak of this I can only give you the impressions and opinions of one man. The field is so great, events move so rapidly, conditions are so changing, that it is difficult to grasp it all, to form matured opinions or to make decisions; but still opinions must be formed and decisions made if we are to take action, and so our war work goes on. If I have any qualification to speak, it must be found in my great interest in the work.

When we speak of war library work, we think of the work of supplying books to our men who are away in the service, but before I speak of that I want to call your attention to the opportunities of library service at home. Our libraries must be operated as usual. Only a small percentage of our people, the best of our young men, are going to war, and the community as a whole needs and relies upon its library, just as before. Our folks at home still want to read. Whatever we can do to keep the current of our life moving smoothly, to keep it sane and hopeful, is worth while; and the continued interest in books may be a great factor in this. So the libra-

rian at home has still the same duties, and to these are added other very important ones to meet the conditions of war.

It has been the work of the library since the beginning of the war to supply the most accurate information possible in regard to its causes, inception and progress. We can do this only by the careful selection of the more valuable from the great multitude of books which are being issued; the selection of the reliable and reasonable, the omission of the carelessly written and of that which is likely to arouse ungrounded hopes or unnecessary fears, and the elimination of that which is intentionally false. In short, we have undertaken to supply our readers at all times with the best, most accurate and timely accounts of the war, in order that they may be well informed as to the progress of events.

For this service, there are available some few attempts at formal general history, none of them probably of lasting value; many accounts of special campaigns and episodes; a great wealth of personal record and reminiscence, some of which has a real value; and a small amount of poetry of a very high order. Some of these volumes of personal experience and of poetry have an added interest from the fact that the writers have given their lives to the cause of which they

write. Such books go further than merely arousing our interest; they awaken our sympathy and enlist our efforts. This leads to the mention of a most important function of the library in war time; namely, the moulding of public sentiment for the support of the government in carrying on the war.

From the beginning, our indignation was stirred by Germany's shameless and unscrupulous disregard of treaty obligations and by her brutal and deliberate atrocities in the invaded countries. But while we were still formally neutral, the library, as a public institution, was obliged to find a place on its shelves for books giving the German view as well as for those favoring the allies. I believe that in most libraries this was reluctantly done. After the sinking of the *Lusitania* the condition became still more difficult. We feared that a nation which failed to protect its citizens and to uphold its national honor, might forfeit its right to freedom and national independence; that "too proud to fight" might come to mean, too late to fight. The events of the last three months in France seem to indicate that the margin of time was small, that a few months' more delay would have been absolutely fatal. We had faith in our government, however, and waited until the word of release came with

the declaration of war. I do not criticize our government for the delay. There were doubtless reasons which I cannot know, but I rejoice that we stand at last with our democratic allies in this struggle for the freedom of the world, and am proud of the vigor and the efficiency with which we have taken up this business of war which has been thrust upon us. We can, as I have intimated, do much by selecting and promoting the use of the right book. We have also, I believe, another duty in the restriction or omission of books and periodicals which support the utterances of the well-meaning but blind pacifist who cries, "Peace! peace!" when there is no peace. Too often the ostensibly pacifist book is merely a camouflaged pro-German argument; as, for instance, Ellen Key's "War, Peace, and the Future," published in 1916, which, under the guise of an argument for peace and an appeal to women to oppose the war, is a bit of pro-German propaganda.

During the first years of the war many pro-German books were issued, but in the past year openly pro-German literature has been very little in evidence. Much, however, has been issued which is in one form or another pro-Germanism of the most dangerous kind. It is found in books which, while shamming Americanism, attack our

allies; books which more or less indirectly defend the policies of Germany and by magnifying her power tend to produce discouragement as to the result of the war; books and periodicals which, while ostensibly supporting the war, unfairly criticize the government, throw discredit upon its motives, and seek to impede its measures. Some of these are merely misinformed, but others are, I believe, the outcome of an insidious and extensive propaganda which has been carried on for a generation throughout society, business, the schools and the library to keep our German-American fellow-citizens still German at heart rather than American. When we know beyond question that the German government has permitted and encouraged a divided allegiance, and has continued to regard Germans who became naturalized in this country as German citizens, we can understand how the German Emperor might have expected that he had in this country a little Germany, an *imperium in imperio*, powerful to prevent us from entering the war.

There are also many important special needs due to the war which the library should meet, such as military manuals and technical books, including books on the aeroplane, the automobile, shipbuilding and technical chemistry. With this last class comes the necessity for care and

restriction, for libraries are warned by the Government Secret Service against issuing books on high explosives.

One of the most important tasks is the supplying of books on the production and conservation of food. In this field much is being done through books, through pamphlets and other material furnished by the Government, and also by means of food exhibits. The Food Commission has drafted into its service several librarians who are giving their full time to this work.

The libraries have been open to many activities outside the domain of regular library work, such as public meetings in their auditoriums and meetings of clubs, patriotic societies, and war service committees in the club-rooms. Librarians have helped in the sale of liberty bonds and war savings stamps, and in collecting for various patriotic purposes. In fact, the library as an American institution with a staff of loyal Americans is taking part in every loyal enterprise. Other problems are developing rapidly with the progress of the war. Those which will be with us immediately are the rehabilitation of the wounded and disabled and the finding of employment for the crippled. In this work the library can and will help.

But, may I return for a moment to the thing

I mentioned first; that is, the normal work of the library. The people at home need relief from the strain and stress of war work, the anxiety which we now feel, the sorrow which will inevitably come to many. They need more than ever the relaxation, the consolation and the inspiration of good books. "Business as usual" is not best in all lines of activity, but for our libraries I believe most heartily in business even better than usual, if possible.

Just one thing more about our libraries before I speak of books for our men in the service. The work of supplying books for the Army and Navy has been intrusted by the United States Government to our libraries. The men and women who are doing the work of organization in Washington, those who are serving as librarians in camp libraries and dispatch stations, and those who have gone overseas, all come from our libraries. The books which are being supplied to the men here and overseas have been collected and forwarded by our libraries. Just as our fleets have their naval bases in which they refit and from which they sail, so our little argosies of books, our libraries in camp and field and fleet, look to the libraries at home as their base of supplies. For this reason also the libraries at home should

carry on more fully, more actively and more effectively than ever before.

From the very beginning of the war, and during that long period before we came in, the need of the men in the Army for reading was recognized in England, and much was done to meet it. The best account of this work may be found in a series of articles by Dr. T. W. Koch, who spent a year or more in England. At that time Dr. Koch had just resigned from the University of Michigan Library, and was having a year's respite from work before taking the position in the Library of Congress which he now fills. His articles have been revised and republished under the title of "Books in Camp, Trench and Hospital," a pamphlet which is supplied by *The Library Journal*.

There were four great agencies organized in England for this purpose. The first was The British Red Cross and Order of St. John War Library, which, initiated within a few days after the war began, supplied books to both camp and field, and reached outlying stations in England, Africa, Bombay, Egypt, Salonika and Malta, as well as those nearer home. The second of these, The Camps Library, was organized particularly to meet the needs of the Colonial troops, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders. It dis-

tributes books directly to the organizations. The third agency, The Young Men's Christian Association, has carried on, in connection with its other work, the supplying of books on a very large scale. The fourth, The British Prisoners of War Book Scheme, planned to supply books, especially those of an educational character, to prisoners of war in camps in Germany and elsewhere. This is being done on a very large scale, and has been of incalculable value. The account which Dr. Koch gives is of great interest, both as to the volume of the work and as indicating the great interest of the Army and Navy men in reading, and the variety of their needs and interests.

As soon as our own country was fairly embarked in the war, the need of similar work for our own men became apparent. At the meeting of the American Library Association in Louisville in June, 1917, it was the topic of supreme interest. Plans were discussed and a War Service Committee of seven was appointed, which Committee still has charge of the work. The Chairman, from the beginning, has been Mr. J. I. Wyer, of the New York State Library.

The War Service Committee decided upon a campaign for money to meet the expense of providing camp buildings and library service, anticipating that the books would be supplied largely

by gifts. The first amount suggested was \$500,000. It was decided, however, to carry on a campaign in October, 1917, for \$1,000,000. This was successfully done, and almost \$1,700,000 was raised, including a gift of \$320,000 from the Carnegie Corporation for the purpose of building thirty-two camp library buildings, at \$10,000 each. In connection with this a campaign for books was carried on.

The War Service Committee were fortunate in securing the services of Dr. Herbert Putnam, the Librarian of Congress, as General Director, and headquarters were established a little later in the Library of Congress, where a spacious room is provided, free of rent, as well as an office for the Financial Secretary. The organization at the headquarters has been greatly enlarged during the winter. There are now several of the leading librarians of the country at work there, together with a large clerical force. The assistants to the Director have different fields of work assigned to them—to one the general management of the camp libraries and stations, to another the work of publicity, to another the personnel, and to another the purchase of books, each having his assistants. In a few months an organization has been perfected which works with the smoothness of any great business.

Beginning last fall, libraries have been built in about thirty-five camps. These were designed by Mr. E. L. Tilton, of New York, and are practically uniform, the normal building being about 120 x 40 feet, in some cases shortened to 93 feet, in some cases having an additional L; in other words, the plan is slightly varied to suit the local conditions. The building is a plain wooden structure, ceiled on the interior for additional warmth in the Northern camps, and left unceiled in the Southern camps. In charge of each of these camp libraries is a trained librarian, with two or more assistants. Each library resembles the main library of a city system, with branches, and the best organized of these camp library systems are supplying books more fully and distributing them more efficiently than most of our libraries at home.

In addition to these camp libraries, dispatch stations for sending books abroad have been established. The first of these was at Hoboken, that being the largest shipping-point for troops. This was established in two adjacent storerooms, and an extensive work has been carried on there for several months. Another was established in March, 1918, at Newport News, Virginia, in office rooms, and has recently been moved to a building constructed after the general type of the

camp library buildings. Additional dispatch stations are now being established in Boston, Brooklyn and Philadelphia. From the two stations in Hoboken and Newport News over one hundred thousand volumes were sent abroad in May. The Newport News Dispatch Station has additional interest from the fact that it is the center of a large number of camps of both soldiers and sailors, all within a radius of thirty miles, and has the direct work of supplying them with books, as well as of shipping books abroad.

As mentioned above, the work in the camp libraries is carried on largely by librarians. In many cases their assistants have not had special library training. The staff is provided in various ways. The Library of Congress gives the services of Dr. Putnam, who receives no additional compensation, and is devoting a large share of his time to the work. Many libraries have given the services of their librarians and other members of their staffs. In other cases, where the library was not able to do this, a leave of absence has been granted, and the services paid for from the War Service fund, in no case a larger amount than the salary already received. Many librarians have volunteered their services, either without any other compensation than actual expense, or for a smaller salary than they were already receiv-

ing. The war organization as a whole is receiving trained service in a very much larger amount than it pays for or is able to pay for. Without this the work could not be carried on successfully.

I have been greatly interested in the part which women are taking in this work, and the still larger part which they may take. The majority of the staff at the headquarters are women, and a large part of the work at Hoboken is done by women. The work at Newport News is in charge of a man who can give only a small part of his time, and is really carried on by a woman, with a staff largely of women. The work there has four divisions: the receipt of books, the selection and the dispatch of books, and the bookkeeping and correspondence. Each of these divisions is in charge of a woman. I began my visits to the camps, I confess, with the feeling that a camp was no place for women. I have been led to the conclusion that there is no camp library in which women could not properly work, nor any in which they could not be of great assistance. I hope to see them more largely employed.

Following the campaign of last fall for money, a great drive for books was instituted and carried on some three months ago, and is still in progress. This was very successful. The latest figures

I have indicated that at least a million and a half volumes have been collected.

The question is asked, "What do the men want to read?" If we consider what our Army really is, I think this question answers itself. The Army is really a cross-section of our whole nation. It includes the illiterate, as well as men most highly educated. It includes men with every variety of interests and tastes. A camp wants just what the city of Cleveland or any other town or city in our country wants in the way of books. The very best we can furnish in philosophy, poetry, religion and sociology, is needed. It is none too good. On the other hand there is nothing so elementary that it will not find a place. There is a sprinkling of illiterates from all parts of the country, and the negro stevedores from the South are largely illiterate. Elementary primers and readers and simple stories find ready use with these men, for their capacity and needs are those of a child of twelve.

The subject-demands from men in the service are largely those of the men at home. Requests come for books on architecture, cabinetmaking and old furniture, chemistry, organic and inorganic, coal-mining, drawing and painting, electricity, engineering in its various branches, fish-curing, gardening and forestry, languages, mete-

orology, music, paper-making, printing, violin-making, and so on. There is also a rather surprising interest in poetry. Probably Kipling's "Barrack-room Ballads" is one of the most popular books in all the libraries. But it is not war poetry alone that is read. James Norman Hall writes in *The New Republic* of "Poetry Under the Fire Test," and tells of the experience of a classmate in the trenches who, on returning about two o'clock in the morning, hears from a dugout the voice of a soldier reading aloud from Milton's "Comus":

"Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats."

Think of the value of such poems as "Kubla Khan" and the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" read in the trenches, or perhaps the "Happy Warrior":

"Who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a Lover; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired."

Read Hugh Britling's letter to his father. It is essentially true. Much evidence of the same

sort may be found in Victor Chapman's letters. The Army's range of reading is indeed that of our whole American people.

To camp libraries, however, must be added books for the military specialist, and his needs are practically the same as those of the specialist at home. There is need for books on military and naval science, books dealing with modern devices of warfare, such as the aeroplane and the submarine, and a great range of technical books. All other needs are being very well supplied by the books coming from our homes. The military and other technical books must be the latest and most approved and are needed in large quantities. These can be secured only by purchase, and thus far they have been supplied only to individuals.

There is one field which has not yet been covered very fully in our training camps. Many classes are organized for officers who wish to carry on definite lines of study under instruction, and the enlisted men also are studying for advancement in their work. Books are needed for these classes which the Government does not supply and which the Library Association has not yet decided to supply. The officers are better able to supply their own text-books, although unfortunately the officers in our Army who are

obliged to depend upon their pay find it difficult to get along under the present living conditions. The enlisted men, whose pay is smaller, and further diminished by the need of insurance and home assignments, find it extremely difficult to meet this need for text-books. I am hopeful that something will be done to meet this, either by the Government or the Library Association.

One need of supreme importance which I have not spoken of is the supplying of Bibles and portions of the Bible in camps. This work is being done upon a very large scale in England, and is now carried on in this country by the American Bible Society and the State Societies. Many touching instances are given of the need and of the eagerness with which these books are received. May I read you what President Wilson says:

“The Bible is the Word of Life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourselves—read, not little snatches here and there, but long passages that will really be the road to the heart of it.

“You will not only find it full of real men and women, but also of things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life, as men have been always, and the more you read the more it will become plain to you what things are worth while and what are not; what things make men happy—loyalty, right deal-

ings, speaking the truth, readiness to give everything for what they think their duty, and, most of all, the wish that they may have the real approval of the Christ, who gave everything for them; and the things that are guaranteed to make men unhappy—selfishness, cowardice, greed, and everything that is low and mean.

“When you have read the Bible you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty.”

I have enjoyed telling you, in this rather un-systematic way, what I happen to know of the things which have been done, but I am much more interested in the greater things which are to be done; which will certainly be done. A year ago, none of us saw what the developments of this year would be, nor can we now see what is to come; but we know there is much to do.

It is interesting to see what experience in the Army is doing for our men. I think we see many proofs that military service is a great educator. The physical training alone is of great value. We all of us know young men who have come back on furlough after a few weeks or months absolutely transformed into something finer and stronger; erect, alert, keen. I have a strong conviction that every young man in the country would be a better man all his life for a year's ser-

vice with the colors. Many of them are living more healthfully, eating better, sleeping better, exercising more regularly, and keeping cleaner than ever before in their lives. They are accepting discipline, learning obedience, cultivating their faculties, becoming more efficient; and they will be better men and far better citizens, for they are having to work together and are learning the real meaning of democracy. In the Army a man is rated by what he is and by what he can do, not by what he has nor the opportunity he has had.

The war is at last bringing to the negroes their opportunity. When we see them marching away to cross the seas and to fight for our flag, we feel more fully than some of us have ever acknowledged, that they too are American citizens. The war will, I believe, bring in an era of real democracy which shall permeate our whole social fabric as never before; that democracy in which, as Lowell states it so happily, we say not "I am as good as you are," but "You are as good as I am."

The war has brought these greatest of all opportunities to our librarians: first, to carry on better at home by meeting the special needs and relieving the strain and anxiety of war; second, to carry libraries as fully as possible to our men in the service. These are the interesting duties of the present; but I believe there is something

even greater for the future. In our present work we are training an army of readers. When the war is over we will find the library occupying a greater place in our community life than ever before, and will find the demands upon it greater than ever. We are giving our men in the Army such service, and we must continue to give it in still larger and better measure, since they will have learned to depend upon the library and will have high ideals of library service. Let us hope that they may not be disappointed, and let us realize, too, that in no way can we better prepare for our future work than by fully doing our work now.

As equipment for our libraries, we have books, the physical apparatus of building and furniture, and library personnel; and upon the interest, efficiency and ideals of this library personnel depends the success of it all. We cannot inculcate the love of books unless we too love them, and we cannot guide others in their use unless we know them. We cannot promote culture unless we in some degree exemplify it; nor can we teach love of our country and sacrifice for it unless we too love and sacrifice for it. An ideal is the greatest force in the world. What hurled the invading Persians back from rocky Greece? A song—a song which afterwards became a book. Homer

painted on the skies of Greece, where all might see, the image of Achilles in shining armor, glowing in all the beauty of young manhood, keen, alert, courageous, eager for deeds of valor; and Achilles became the ideal for young Greece. Three hundred Greek youths, each an Achilles, met the Persians at Thermopylæ, died gloriously and achieved immortality, inspired by a poet. The poets and thinkers have not lost their inspiration. Is it not our duty through them to set before our boys and girls, our young men and women, not a shining Achilles, but a high and consistent ideal of American manhood and womanhood?

You young women of the graduating class are fortunate, and are to be felicitated on entering upon your work at a time fraught with such wonderful possibilities. Let me in concluding leave with you one earnest admonition: of the two fields of library work now open, the one at home and the other in war work, the war service looms up large. It is carried on under new and interesting conditions; it has something picturesque, the tinge of romance which is attractive. But I want you to realize that where one can go into the war service, fifty or a hundred must carry on at home; and just as the munitions maker and the farmer help as truly as the man in the firing

line, so the librarian at home is helping just as much as the one in camp. The only question is, where your real duty lies; not whether you want to go into war service, but whether you ought to go.

I want to close with the last words of a man I have always admired, Sir Richard Grenville, whom Tennyson depicts lying wounded to death on the deck of his vessel, surrounded by Spaniards:

“Here die I, Richard Grenville, with a joyful and quiet mind: for that I have ended my life as a true soldier ought to do, that hath fought for his countrey, Queen, religion and honour. Whereby my soul most joyfully departeth out of this body, and shall always leave behind it an everlasting fame of a valiant and true soldier; that hath done his dutie as he was bound to do.”



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